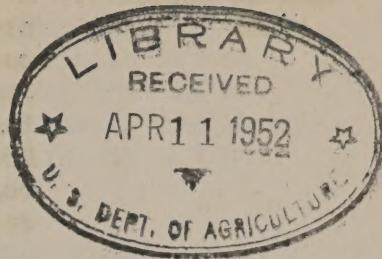


UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
Extension Service  
Washington 25, D. C.

FACTS AND QUOTATIONS GIVING HIGHLIGHTS  
OF CONFERENCE ON RURAL READING

September 24-26, 1951



Who was there?

About 100 people whose bond was an interest in books. Educators, librarians, and extension workers were there because they felt the need of further stimulation of reading by rural people. Others, including farm organizations' representatives, community leaders, and rural citizens, felt the need of more and better books to read. Others, including book publishers and book sellers, felt the need of wider distribution of books.

Who held the conference?

Sponsored by the Extension Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture, who shared the planning with librarians (including Dan Lacy of the Library of Congress, Ralph Shaw, Librarian, U. S. Department of Agriculture, and Mrs. Margie Malmberg of the American Library Association), with book publishers through Theodore Waller of the American Book Publishers Council), with book readers (Angus MacDonald of the Farmers Union, Roger Fleming of the Farm Bureau, Lloyd Halvorson of the Grange, Howard McClaren of the American Institute of Cooperation), and others.

Why?

"The habit of using books and the practical freedom to do so are indispensable in American life. It is in rural areas of the country that the problem of access to these resources is gravest. The purpose of the conference is to explore this problem and the possible means of solving it. It is clear that its solution will require both means of encouraging interest in reading and means of making books realistically and conveniently accessible." — The Planning Committee.

Keynote

"We who are engaged in education, in writing and in publishing, have both a responsibility and an opportunity to see that an adequate supply of the right reading materials is made available to rural communities . . . While reading habits have changed and will continue to change with the development of other media of communication, reading will remain the main channel of acquiring information of a permanent nature . . . No matter how far television and radio may progress, they will never fully replace reading . . . We are safe in assuming there are still millions in rural communities with an insatiable appetite for the fare which comes only by way of the printed page. Let us see that they get sufficient literary nourishment of the right kind. They are going to help determine the future course of America's progress." — Carl R. Woodward, President, University of Rhode Island.

What do people read?

A symposium on what is known about what and why people read brought forth some interesting statistics. "About 90-95 percent of the people listen to the radio. 80-90 percent read the newspapers regularly. . . . About two-thirds of the adults in the United States read a magazine regularly. 25 percent, most of the figures agree, read as a kind of a regular thing, a book a month; 50 percent of the adults read a book a year." --- Dr. Robert Leigh, Columbia University.

What farmers read?

"In our particular poll, we found 42 percent of the farmers saying fiction is what they read; 16 percent said they read biographies; 28 percent said they read historical novels; and 12 percent said they read poetry. Somewhere below that you have vocational reading. My guess is that they read about the same as city people. We have some evidence to indicate that well written books on how to do it, such as how to raise better livestock, are generally in demand, and the price of the book is oftentimes no great hindrance to a farmer if he wants it. They do want inexpensive books, and they do buy inexpensive books, but we do have many who buy three or four or five dollar books." --- Maurice Wieting, Ohio Farm Bureau.

From a rural librarian.

"We say people read if books are available, but we say nothing about the fact that books are never available unless people want them, and they don't know they want them until they have them, so we have a chicken - and egg deal. . . . Motivations for reading are varied and can be anything. Usually the real motivation stems from the home. It seems to me we have a very great opportunity to build rural or urban motivation for reading through group activities. All kinds of interaction occur when people come together in groups." --- Ruth Warncke, Librarian, Kent County Library, Kent County, Michigan.

Elementary school libraries.

"I am interested in reading and I am interested in books, but I am interested more in what those books do for those children." --- Nancy Jane Day, Instructor in Library Science, Winthrop College, Rock Hill, South Carolina.

"Five dollars a year per teacher for books may not be considered adequate, but that is what we have in Kansas. Right now 40 percent of the citizens do not have access to libraries. Town after town has no book store. People are not reading books. They have no books to buy. They aren't seeing books in libraries." --- Mrs. Ruth Gagliardo, PTA, Kansas.

Where homes are far apart.

"In my State (North Dakota) 71 percent are without library services. . . . We have found that if we are going to develop a library program in North Dakota, we have to go down to the local level, and from the local and county level develop the need for the State Library Commission to supplement the work done on the county level." --- Mrs. Lulu Evanson, Educational Director for the No. Dak. Farmers Union.

Comment from the floor.

"When you are talking about using the libraries, I think of our librarian in the little town where I live (around 20,000). Once a week she has a little column in the paper. She doesn't write the usual book review, which is dry as dust. She just tells you this book is in and that it's about so and so. She has a real flair for making the books sound exciting. I try to get down to the library and get one, but by Monday morning they are gone."

Another voice.

"A teacher of English in an Iowa school got disturbed because high school students stopped reading the minute they finished school. So about March 1, she dropped the study of Macbeth and put this proposition to them, 'What 25 books will you add to your personal home library when you get through school?' They made their own selections and debated much among themselves. They left school with some ideas of the books they would like to own to continue reading in their own homes."

Low-cost, paper-bound reprints.

"Our industry has grown from a net sale in 1939 of 3,000,000 books to a figure in 1950 of 214,000,000. Our books have sold through 100,000 retail outlets. They are serviced by magazine wholesalers in cities throughout the country, in addition to which they are sold on a direct basis to libraries, to book stores; used by a great many universities and colleges to supplement their reading; sold by trade unions, and sold to farmer cooperatives. The principal effect, we feel, of our particular endeavor is that we are promoting book ownership and the development of home libraries." -- R. J. Crohn, New American Library of World Literature, representing publishers of low-cost editions.

Representing the Book Sellers.

"To our mind the rural areas are the least touched of all the book fields. . . . We have two or three things which we might offer. One is the idea of mailing books from the stores to the rural areas which can be done reasonably easily. Another is the taking of books to the rural areas which is a physical job but which can be done through the medium of book fairs or advertisers. The third is the establishment of an information service in the ABA headquarters in New York so any person in the country who doesn't have a bookstore or information available can write to our office and get the information he needs, not only about the book but where it is available, whether it is in print, and get it quickly.

"For several years we have been setting up book displays in gymnasiums. It has mostly been done in the cities, but we are now going into consolidated schools and small towns surrounding our cities. This lasts for two days or three days or as long as it takes for every child in the area to come in and thoroughly look at the books." - Allan McMahan, President, American Book Sellers Association.

Speaking for  
Poetry.

"This word 'culture' scares me. I think it really means: to spread the mechanics of common knowledge over common persons and common processes of life, to disclose that under that light culture is the work of imagination among men. . . . Those marvelous pictures in the *Odyssey* and the *Scriptures* are the poetry of the imagination of many men. . . . The demand for the rhyme is universal and profoundly deep. From the beginning of time until now, if we want to inculcate in noble fashion the elevated thoughts and feelings of man — to immortalize them in vividness — poetry is the avenue to which we turn, and I suppose will continue to turn — to express ourselves in the field of the most intelligible of the arts." — Prof. T. V. Smith, Professor, Citizenship and Philosophy, Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York.

Attitude toward  
cost of books.

"I think one of our problems is the attitude of school librarians and book people. We all look at this book buying as a very expensive thing. A book I say, is not expensive. The people buying television today are innumerable. They spend \$150 or \$200 for a radio, \$1,500 or \$1,800 for an automobile and then look with horror upon spending \$5, \$50, or even \$100 to build a home library." — Warren J. Davis, President of United Educators, Inc. (representing publishers of encyclopedia and reference books.)

Youth and books.

"There are boys and girls in rural schools who simply don't know there are books on interesting subjects; on boxing, or baseball, or maybe soil conservation, if that is interesting to them. . . . the books must be brought to the rural communities, but in addition to that the books must somehow be made to come alive to the people who see them and nobody but another person can do that. The best way of doing it is by word of mouth. The other medium is through a television, radio, and all kinds of news. The important thing is to talk about books." — Margaret C. Scoggin, librarian, author, and book reviewer for youth.

A 16-year old  
4-H Club girl.

"Look at it from the teen-ager's angle. They can glance at the headlines and get an idea of what is going on in the world. And you listen to the radio while you finish your homework. And, of course, all the teen-agers read magazines, particularly where they have a lot of pictures, because it is faster that way. Going to the movies, that is a regular dating habit. Have you ever heard of a couple staying home to read a book?

"In previous times most of the education was done by reading. Today when you go into a modern classroom you see that the motion picture projector has become a standard equipment and you see that the teenagers are required to read certain magazines once a week to keep up with the news and the weekly newspapers. Most of the schools have several radios and a lot have television. All of these things have helped to liven your classroom, but what has become of reading.

Remember this: Democracy, education, and reading, is the sequence that no one should overlook." --- Patricia Watts, Reisterstown, Maryland.

Distribution problem.

"In 1950 book publishers in this country issued 11,000 titles of which, however, only 8,600 were entirely new books. The remainder were new editions or reprints — a little over 80 percent of the output of new titles in 1950 were in the various classifications of non-fiction. . . . the 52 largest publishers account for only 55 percent of the new titles and in 1950, 313 publishers issued 5 or more titles each. There is a publisher available for any book that seems to have the slightest chance of a sufficient audience to justify its publication.

"On the side of the publishers and distributors of books, the defect at the moment is certainly one of inadequate distribution . . . . There still remains the very difficult problem of making the whole range of hard-bound books more accessible in rural areas not through the gradual spread of public and school library service, but by making books more directly accessible for purchase by the farm population, as its need and desire for books increases." --- John O'Connor, President, American Book Publishers Council.

Books about national and international affairs

"Small town bookstores aren't likely to have many books developed on either government policies or foreign affairs. Such books are normally marginal sellers, and it does not pay a small bookstore to stock them.

"Another point about such books is they are often dull. I spend a good part of my working day trying to persuade authors to make their books more interesting. To be interesting a book has to have a certain feeling of excitement about it, written with some enthusiasm. A good many books on international and foreign policy are written with a solemn and stodgy air . . .

"Publishers feel this need even more than readers do, I think, because our living depends on it. If you have any writers in your community I think you can assure them there is a wide open field, both in scientific writing and public affairs writing. If anyone can do it accurately and well there is a fair and reasonable career ahead of him." --- John Fischer, Harper and Bros.

Different books.

"If we are going to sell fiction in the rural markets we will have to get different books." --- Sanford Cobb, Head of the Book Department, Sears, Roebuck and Co.

What books do  
rural people  
want?

"Nonfiction which is clear, vital, and inspirational. They want to know more about the American past which they believe in: and more about the projected future of a world they want to believe in: and more about whatever part they can play in building a fellowship of nations. They want readable biographies of people they can respect and admire, whether the subjects are famous or just good citizens.

"They want fiction which seems to them potentially true and worth while about characters they feel better by having met, characters whom it is conceivable that they themselves might be if they lived or had grown up in New York or Hollywood or England or Japan or Pakistan.

"They want fiction, nonfiction, and poetry which they do expect to treasure for a lifetime and itemize in their wills, and which therefore is worth the price of their binding - attractive, fine, good paper, and clear print.

"They want light, pleasant fiction and readable nonfiction of fleeting or doubtful value, either bound or at reprint prices." — Gladys Hasty Carroll, author, South Berwick, Maine.

**Discussion groups.** Five groups composed of those attending the conference held round-table discussion on various aspects of (1) the stimulation of interest in reading among rural people, and (2) the availability of reading materials to rural people. Among the primary questions they considered were: What can rural organizations do to stimulate reading? What can be and is being done by rural press and radio in the way of reviews and criticisms of books? Are the present library facilities in rural areas being fully used? How may they be supplemented? How can commercial distribution of books be extended to increase service to rural areas? While no formal resolutions or recommendations were made by the conference a host of ideas as to how organizations and agencies might encourage reading interests were developed. Summaries of the group discussions were distributed to the participants.

Where do we go  
from here?

A number of State and possibly county conferences on rural reading are expected to be held by State and local organizations and agencies as an outcome of the national conference.

One result of the conference has been to stimulate interest in publishing the great wealth of ideas and information in book form. An interested author is working on a manuscript that should prove to be useful to librarians, discussion leaders, teachers and extension workers. If present plans develop successfully, a book designed to encourage wider reading should be available early in 1952.

A brief report of the conference is being prepared by the Extension Service for distribution to the participants and others who are especially interested.